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Turner: spy agency reforms will continue

Turner at CIA: full steam ahead



Trimming "excess people" from the CIA was necessary, says Stansfield Turner, to improve a U.S. spy operation that has been "run like a family business for 30 years." Admiral Turner also discusses the capabilities of a new Soviet challenge: so-called hunter-killer satellites.

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Washington

Despite much criticism, the director of U.S. intelligence operations says that he intends to move ahead aggressively with his reshaping of America's spy agencies.

Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of central intelligence, asserted at a breakfast meeting with reporters that before he took over, the clandestine operations division of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), where he has made major and controversial personnel cuts, had been run for 30 years "like a family business."

Answering criticism from CIA officers whom he has ousted, Admiral Turner declared: "If you want happy spies, I'm not out here to give you that . . . but if you want effective spies, I will give you that."

In response to questions on the Soviet Union's capabilities to destroy American satellites, Admiral Turner acknowledged that the Soviets had developed hunter-killer satellites capable of knocking out some American satellites. Although he refused to be more specific about this, the admiral was apparently referring to Soviet satellites which would be capable of destroying relatively low-flying U.S. reconnaissance satellites, but not of hitting the high-flying communications satellites which transmit U.S. military orders.

At a press conference Jan. 31, President Carter declared that the Soviets do not have the capability to disrupt the sending of U.S. military orders by satellite.

Admiral Turner also said that he saw no sign that the Soviets would let up in their efforts to strengthen both their conventional and strategic forces over the next decade. He said the Soviets put great emphasis on military strength, because they have been unable to compete effectively with the United States in the economic and political fields.

Admiral Turner said the Soviets lagged behind the United States in the technical aspects of intelligence gathering — a reflection of an overall lag in technology — but that they had established a "massive" worldwide espionage program.

The number of Soviet agents in the United States, he said, was "just multiplying," but he declined to go into details concerning the Soviet spying effort in the U.S.

On his efforts to improve management of the CIA, the admiral, who is both director of central intelligence and head of the CIA, said that the cuts he has made in the supersecret clandestine operations division were of "excess people . . . who clog the system." He said he has not reduced the country's intelligence gathering capabilities overseas. The cuts, he added, had been made at the headquarters level, while the number of spies in the field remained the same.

At times pounding the table to make his point, Admiral Turner said the clandestine operations division had not had a good personnel management or career planning system and that promising intelligence officers in their 40s had been held back by older and less effective senior officers.

"It's been run . . . like a family business for 30 years," he said. "We need a personnel management system that is run on a non-familial basis."

Now at the end of his first year as director of central intelligence, the admiral denied reports that there had been any pressure to remove him. He said he was "very excited about the future" of U.S. intelligence because of: (1) the recently announced presidential executive order which provides for reorganization of the intelligence agencies, (2) the leadership team which he has now brought into place at the top of the CIA, and (3) the "strong momentum" which he feels is gathering behind his efforts to provide better intelligence.

He also said that he believed the American people had reached the point where they have stopped engaging in "self-flagellation" over intelligence abuses and have acquired a greater appreciation of the importance of intelligence gathering.

In answer to criticisms of his leadership style, Admiral Turner declared: "I've made a profession of leading men and women. I'm good at it. . . . And I'll continue to be good at it."